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SP 501 Communication for Christian Leaders

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COMMUNICATION FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

SP 501: SPRING 2003 TUES/THUR, 9:30-10:45 AM, M306. WED, 9-10:50 SH231
PROFESSOR: MIKE PASQUARELLO

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Office Hours: Tuesday-Thursday before class, and by appointment.

The purpose of *Communication For Christian Leaders* is to provide an introduction to and context for the art of written and spoken communication within a theological framework that serves the purposes of Christian ministry. The course has been designed to address particular needs in the Asbury Seminary curriculum by providing a foundation for preaching and teaching ministries. Our learning will proceed by means of reflection and performance; we will examine both Christian and classical rhetoric to acquire practical wisdom for clear, coherent, and persuasive written and oral communication in the service of the Gospel and Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The course will enable students to:

- 1) acquire a basic understanding of the most important features of biblical and classical rhetoric in the service of Christian speech;
- 2) discern how theory is embedded in and informs practice to enable perspective and judgment for faithful and fitting Christian communication;
- 3) sharpen their capacity for: critical thinking, clear, coherent presentation, and persuasive delivery that displays Christian convictions, character and purpose;
- 4) participate in the joys and challenges of speaking and listening as leaders and representatives of the Christian community

REQUIRED TEXTS

Quentin Schultze, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age*

Richard Winter, *Still Bored in Culture of Entertainment: Rediscovering Passion and Wonder*

Augustine of Hippo, *Teaching Christianity*

Stephen E. Lucas, *The Art of Public Speaking* (Student Workbook)

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

Reading and responding to the required texts: **A three to four page presentation**, arranged according to the topics addressed by Schultze, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart*, that discusses and proposes PRACTICAL wisdom that informs Christian witness and community. Your imaginary readers are students who belong to a University campus ministry group. (In other words, don't write for the professor)

Some issues you might want to consider: What does Schultze help us to understand about the cultural/media context in which we communicate? Is it neutral? What are its potential

and/or real implications for and effects upon Christian witness and community? What is helpful and/or harmful? How may the way we communicate as Christians provide a critique and an alternative to our culture?

Read Winter's *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment*. Utilizing both Winter's critical and constructive engagement of church and culture, **craft a practical vision** (2-3 pages) for Christian communication in our time, considering Who, What, Why, and How?

Read the *Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Ephesians*. Pay close attention to what he says about speech, words, Christ, and God's Word. **Write a 2-page reflection** that considers: What is the Apostle alerting us to watch for when he speaks of "principalities and powers"? How should this inform our perspective on cultural forms of communication and the various media we may use? Are these technologies harmless or neutral? For the church, how does the redemptive work of God in Christ inform our use of these resources and us as their users?

A three page written response to Augustine's "Teaching Christianity." Describe the kind of people he believes we must become, especially with regard to the important issues of faith, character, wisdom, and constancy of purpose if we are to be faithful Christian communicators. What do we need to know? What kind of knowledge does he prescribe? How can this be acquired? Why do you think this work was the standard text on the subject for over 1,000 years? Why would you recommend it today? Of what value is this book for the practice of ministry?

3 oral presentations, 5-7 minutes in length. Each will be made on a Christian topic, theme, person, or subject, **and will not be about you!** Your aim will be to instruct, engage, and persuade, to effect understanding, emotions, and behavior. This must be supported by authority (ies) *other than your personal experience, opinion, feeling, etc.* (Scripture, Tradition, Christian examples, etc.) Assume that the class is your audience. An outline of the presentation must be handed in with a manuscript. List the references you have used. Your delivery may include the use of one page of notes for the first and second speeches. The third speech must be given without notes.

PLEASE NOTE: *Your first speech will be evaluated for you to revise, improve and re-present. Your third speech, which will be given with no notes, should be on an entirely different topic.*

A final essay is due on the last day of class that should be no more than ten, double-spaced pages in length. Please carefully check grammar and spelling. This is not a research paper, but a reflective essay on the practice of communication for Christian leaders in light of what has been read, discussed, learned, and completed in this class. Attach an introduction and conclusion to your written work on Schultz, Winter, and Augustine, providing a clear summary of important practical wisdom a Christian communicator must acquire and exemplify for faithful persuasion in our contemporary church/culture context.

COURSE EVALUATION (See the Seminary Catalogue for grading guidelines)

Reading, written responses, evaluations: 25%

Participation and attendance: 10%

Final Paper: 15%

Oral Presentations: 50%

All presentations must be given on the assigned dates, make-ups cannot be scheduled unless there is a very Written work that is submitted late will be penalized. Please consult the Asbury Catalogue for information on late and make-up work.

I welcome you to this class. My goal is that you will grow in your character, conviction, and courage as a Christian communicator. I also hope you will begin to make important connections between the Word of God and human words, God's speech and human speech, recognizing that not only what we say, but who we are, and also how, why, and to whom we speak are critical issues that must be seriously examined from a sound theological perspective. I encourage you to see this course in light of your vocation: preaching, teaching, counseling, administration, specialized ministries, etc. Use what we do to prepare yourself for the next step you will take on the path to that ministry. This course is also a prerequisite for Preaching 610. Therefore, we will not go back to cover these topics in preaching, but rather will assume that you have had an introduction to a basic level of rhetoric and have reflected on its importance, from within a Christian framework, for teaching and proclaiming the Gospel. This should give you a strong head start in preaching, and allow you to concentrate on the important homiletic matters of biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and pastoral discernment in preparing yourself to preach.

I would welcome the opportunity to get better acquainted with you and to learn more of your vocational plans and how this course may equip you for answering God's call. Please feel free to email me with your questions and concerns during the semester. I will respond as soon as possible. I also will be holding office hours on Tuesday and Thursday before class and by appointment.

Peace,

Mike Pasquarello
Assistant Professor of Preaching
Asbury Theological Seminary

You are the pastor, a staff member, or a person who works in a full-time ministry, such as a hospital chaplain, Christian counselor, or campus minister. Whoever you are, you have been selected to address the congregation where you worship and/or serve. The occasion is a congregational meeting to make a decision on starting a new service of worship on Saturday evening that will be contemporary in style and intentionally aimed at reaching out into the community. Your task is to propose this ministry to the congregation, offering justification for its implementation, while appealing for the full support of the church and its resources: prayer, money, space, equipment, hospitality, personnel, acceptance, etc.

The congregation is located in an urban community, where it has been for over 100 years. The church membership has declined substantially over the past 30 years, as many of its members moved out to the suburbs and its young people grew up and moved away from home. The congregation includes many older members who have been active for years and have known each other well for a long time. They do not understand why their church has declined, but they are very anxious and worried about its future, especially as they have watched an increasing number of the faithful die.

There is a small but active core of middle-aged and younger adults who either grew up in the church or have moved into the city where they are purchasing older homes and investing in their renovation. Most of them are college-educated and professionals, some are fairly new to Christianity and the church. They are very excited about reaching the community around the church and have brought their concerns to the leadership of the congregation. After several meetings and a consultation with your denomination, it has been decided by the pastoral staff and key leaders that offering an opportunity for worship and friendship that is oriented towards the unchurched is the most fitting way for the congregation to make God's presence known in the community.

The biggest challenge that you face is that the surrounding neighborhood has become mixed to include, along with the younger professionals: ethnic minorities, lower-class families, and a growing gay culture. Crime has increased in the area and the church buildings have been broken into several times during the past few years, with sound equipment worth \$2,000 being stolen.

How will you prepare for this presentation? What sorts of important issues will you consider? How will you choose, support, and organize your material?

SP501---Appreciative, Evaluative, and Suggestive Comments on Oral Presentations

Your identification with the real or imagined audience, how you included the listener as an important participant.

Your self-presentation: ethos, the way you communicated yourself as part of the message.

The signs, gestures, language, attitudes, and convictions that were displayed.

Were you engaging and compelling, what made your presentation attractive and interesting?

Was there clarity and organization that made the message easy to follow and to grasp?
Was this message appropriate for the audience? Was your purpose clear?

How style and delivery enhanced or detracted from our hearing.

Revelation is God's rhetorical activity, while Christian communication in response to God's speech is our human rhetorical activity. Both are persuasive in nature, since faith in Christ cannot be coerced, but must be offered freely and with gratitude. Our speech may take a number of different forms, not being limited to reason alone, but to include the emotions, the will, or heart, in order to engage and persuade the whole person for faithful, active response to the Divine Speaker.

Acts 17:16-34 provides a wonderful example of St. Paul at work, attempting to persuade the very brightest and best of pagan culture in Athens. The story opens with his frank acknowledgement of a wasteland full of idols (17:16). Paul knows his audience, their history, their intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities; he understands their assumptions though he does not share them. The feeling is mutual, since they look down upon him as a "babbler, a preacher of "foreign divinities" (17:18). We too, may sound this way to many people in our increasingly post-Christian culture.

Paul begins his speech by flattering his listeners, commending them for their search and desire to know and to worship divinity, the "unknown god" (17:23). He recognizes that they fall far short of a fully developed Jewish faith, but he still attempts to minister to these intellectual "seekers." He appeals to their knowledge of creation and our common humanity, drawing several conclusions concerning his God, who made the world and everything in it. He even goes so far as to quote one of their pagan poets, to draw upon their experience of the world, since they do not know the Scriptures of Israel.

However, Paul makes a big move in his presentation, shifting the focus from creation to Jesus, the Lord of all creation, the judge and savior of everyone and everything. Paul knows that simply pointing to the stars, the seas, the flowers and trees, will not be sufficient to persuade his listeners. Revelation takes us where observation alone cannot go. What we see is fading, passing away, in decay and decline, destined for death. So, Paul must risk offending his listeners' sensibilities and incurring their rejection. He concludes his speech with the assertion that for Christians the resurrection of Jesus is our "assurance" that this one is the "Lord of heaven and earth" (17:24). Springtime, sunny days, fresh flowers and green grass are not enough, something beyond the natural is needed.

Moreover, Paul's appeals to reason and the natural world, the common ground he established, had limits. Although he was committed to "become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some," in order to engage in "faithful" persuasion, it was necessary to invoke divine revelation and the scandal of faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Most of Paul's listeners mocked him and ridiculed such nonsense. But a few believed. Paul's proclamation cannot be judged on the basis of its results, neither may ours. As Christian leaders, we may not win an approving response, since the Word creates two kinds of listeners; those who believe, and those who do not believe. Even the oratorical skill of St. Paul, or yours and mine, cannot remove the offense of the gospel. The God whom we worship, the Holy One of Israel who sent his Son, Jesus Christ, is neither self-evident nor capable of being known by any educated, reasonable person. To know and love God is a gift of grace, not the result of any human accomplishment.

Augustine of Hippo: “De Doctrina Christiana”

For almost 1500 years Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* (Teaching Christianity) has played a prominent role in teaching students and pastors to communicate the Word of God. Augustine’s purpose in writing was theological, for which he utilized his training in classical rhetoric to turn the attention of Christian pastors and laity to God, inviting them to join a conversation that occurs through the persuasive power of the Holy Spirit in the teaching of Divine Wisdom disclosed and discovered in scripture. Augustine is about the business of conversion and the formation of Christian character, which reveals his strong commitment to the life-shaping role of scripture for the church. He is concerned to show how scripture unites wisdom and eloquence to provide the exemplary material the Christian communicator needs.

Book I gives us what Augustine regards as the essential subject matter of scripture. He speaks of this as the church’s rule of faith which points to the true objects of human enjoyment; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the one Being who is the living God. This theological perspective begins with God rather than speaker or audience, it constitutes the *ethos* that creates and forms the identity and activity of a Christian communicator: the worship and obedience of God by his people. The remainder of *Book I* offers a practical exposition of the law of love. According to Augustine, the sum and fulfillment of scripture is the law of love --- for God and neighbor --- any interpretation and communication that does not build up this twofold law of love is mistaken.

Teaching Christianity demonstrates Augustine’s conviction that theology, as signified by scripture and communicated by Christian leaders, is a theology of the inexorable love of God demanding love in return. Thus, in *Books II* and *III* Augustine states that the most important characteristic is humility of mind before scripture. The interpreter/communicator needs fear of the Lord (godly reverence), knowledge, piety, strength and resolution, purity of vision (the heart), and wisdom. However, prayer, complete attention to God, is more important than anything else. This is how the truth of scripture, the speaker’s message --- *logos* --- is discovered, as we grow in knowledge and love of the triune God through the constancy of Christian worship and obedience.

Book VI of *Teaching Christianity* provides an account of preaching and teaching as both a divine and human activity that instructs, convicts, and converts by witnessing to the truth of the triune God discovered in scripture, a witness that is capable of moving the human heart and mind to salvation. Because of Augustine’s confidence in the efficacy of God’s Word and grace, he was suspicious of human speech that follows the drift of popular art forms, fads, and means of entertainment to cater to the likes and preferences of listeners. He recognizes that words may be used to do great good or great damage; that what is spoken is always shaped by the commitments and wisdom of the speaker, for better or worse. Shorn of depth of character, habits, desires and dispositions created by consistent attention to God in worship and the discipline of the church, Christian communicators may easily become “word-smiths” who peddle their wares to consumers of religion. The scope of scripture, love for God and neighbor, must guide the speaker to discern the true needs of listeners and to inform and shape faithful speech in response to God’s Word and purposes.